

Vista Private School 8265 West 3700 South Magna, Utah 84044

March 29, 2006





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

Vista Private School 8265 West 3700 South Magna, Utah 84044

March 29, 2006

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, March 29, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Vista Private School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Ron Crossman is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Vista Private School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Vista Private School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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VISTA PRIVATE SCHOOL

Administration and Staff Ron Crossman Principal Steven Puente Office Manager Kathy Larson...... Office Manager **Faculty** Kris Carlson Amy Higbee **Bob Tiney** Heather Christopher Mike Kelly **Brian Wilding** Shannon Mortensen Dana Finlayson **Therapists and Counselors** Dr. Jeffery Kovnick Aaron Aldredge Ryan Pepper Matt Checketts Brian Lepinske Steve Sawyer Natasha Muren Jason Seavey Larry Dixon Dr. Lori Neeleman, Matt Dixon Dr. Wendy Hoyt, Ph.D. Ph.D. Support Staff Cafeteria **Custodial Staff Clinical Supervisors** Chris Caldereon— Chad Rose Traci Anderson Chef (Dimple Dell) **Shift Supervisors** Jason Seavey Casey Kemp—Chef Lisa Machienki (Magna) April Wilcox

VISTA PRIVATE SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Vista Private School is, first and foremost, to support the therapy and rehabilitation programs of Vista Treatment Center for our students, and second, to regain, maintain, and/or attain the academic levels to which our students are expected to be educated. We strive to prepare students for responsible citizenship and life-long learning. The growth and welfare of our students is our priority.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

Areas We believe... 1. Physical Facility Vista should provide a safe and secure environment. Faculty, students, and staff are all responsible for maintaining the facilities and equipment. 2. Student Accountability All members of the school community should treat one another with respect. Vista should promote good citizenship and prepare students to be good citizens. Students should have a positive experience in school. Students need to take an active and prominent role in their learning. 3. Community All school community groups should assist faculty in student therapy and education. Communication between students, teachers, and therapists is essential for a positive school experience. 4. Technology Technology should be available to every student for research and study.

of the student.

Technology should aide the educational experience

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in Accreditation, Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, MS, Consultant in Accreditation

Laurie Laird, MS, Director of Education New Haven School

VISITING TEAM REPORT

VISTA PRIVATE SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

UT-TEX, INC., dba Vista Adolescent Treatment Center, was opened in October 1991. Vista is a residential treatment center licensed by the State of Utah, Department of Human Services, Office of Licensing. Vista has been accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations since 1997 and has continued to maintain that accreditation.

Vista Private School was developed as the academic component of the residential treatment setting and provides ongoing academic support to residents during the course of their treatment stay. Since 1991, Vista Private School has also been accredited academically through the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. Vista Private School initially started out with nine residential students but has expanded to two campuses and more than 60 students. One campus is in Magna, Utah, and the other is in Dimple Dell.

Matt Dixon, the founder and owner, designed Vista with the belief that adolescents struggling with mental health and addiction issues need an environment that is safe, structured, and well-organized. His idea that students struggle with relationship issues evolved into the concept that they should be treated with dignity and respect in a loving, caring, and structured environment. If this were done, the opportunity for long-term success and long-term behavioral change would be greatly enhanced.

The nature of the typical student has changed over the years. Initially, Vista provided services to adolescents ranging in age from 12-18; however, since 1998 the program has focused on students in grades 9-12. This change has required the school to revisit the curriculum and course offerings. The various needs of the students attending Vista require a thorough evaluation of incoming transcripts so the students' time at the center is focused and directed toward their individual needs, especially with regard to graduation and college admission. Few students are residents of Utah. The majority of students come from the Northeastern states, and the rest are primarily from Midwestern states, California, Hawaii, and Canada. Upon entrance, all of the students have been working with mental health professionals for over two years on an outpatient basis with little success in changing behavioral outcomes.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The school discovered significant findings about each student, since each is carefully profiled in order to individualize instruction to the extent possible and to

help students with their psychological and behavioral issues. The Visiting Team notes that Vista adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational and rehabilitative direction for each student.

The school's analysis of the profile includes the identification of its strengths and limitations, and for the most part it provides a description of the "big picture" about the performance of the school. Profile information was used in drafting the school's improvement plan.

The self-evaluation was primarily done by departments. (Much of the profiling information was, therefore, found in the "departments" section of the report instead of in the "profile" section.) The Visiting Team members agreed that this analysis was thorough and revealed both strengths and limitations, as well as how each department was meeting or planned to meet the school's holistic DRSLs.

The Visiting Team notes that in preparing the profile, the school followed the guidelines of the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and the NSSE handbook, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance* as well as the Utah accreditation handbook, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team commends the profile information that is given. The data given includes assessments (achievement, exit, observation, participation, and perception) and artifacts (external communications, materials, organizational documents, and records). It also includes information on the type of disorders that are treated at the school, daily and weekly schedules, information on residential life and the academic program, results of surveys, questions and answers about the school, and major improvements that have been made since the school was founded. Some of this information is found in the opening section of the report, which describes Vista.

The total profiling information given in the different sections of the report gives the reader the "big picture" of the school and its programs, both academic and therapeutic.

The Visiting Team commends Vista for being accredited by the Joint Commission on Health Care Organizations (JCAHO). JCAHO is known for its thorough evaluation procedures and its positive, results-directed emphasis

The school is reminded to continue to put its best foot forward and to profile thoroughly.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

The profiling was rather extensive. However, information on follow-up (longitudinal studies of success) after students leave Vista would be most helpful and of great value to the school. Also, as noted above, more data could be provided in the "profile" section instead of in different sections. Of course, the Visiting Team respects the style and formatting the school wishes to use.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?
 - This has been very well accomplished, as noted in Chapter 1, through analysis of each department. The school is reminded to include students in the ongoing collaborative process of self-evaluation.
- b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

Strengths and limitations appear to be well defined in each department.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Vista's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) and indicators of achievement of each are as follows:

Communication and Collaboration

- Students communicate using a variety of modes e.g. oral, written, listening skills, and artistic.
- Students show effective collaboration through negotiating diverse points of view in cooperative settings.
- Students show self-advocacy through effective communication.
- Students recognize that all stakeholders support them in the school community.

Thinking and Reasoning Skills

• Students analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information to understand society and form opinions about critical issues.

- Students generate new and creative ideas by taking risks in a variety of contexts.
- Students integrate problem-solving techniques through logical examination, predicting consequences, and justifying conclusions.

Character Development

- Students learn to respect the rights of others.
- Students take responsibility and accept consequences for their decisions and actions.
- Students develop a positive attitude toward themselves and others.

Continuous Learning

- Students demonstrate their skills to access information from a variety of sources.
- Students recognize the educational value of cultural, technological, and personal experiences.
- Students initiate personal educational goals as part of the life-long learning process.

Learning Climate

- Students are safe at school.
- Students develop appropriate and effective relationships with school staff.
- Students take pride in their physical environment.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?
 - The mission statement expresses precisely and succinctly the purpose of the academic division of Vista. The academic staff collaborated on forming the mission statement, which, indeed, defines a compelling purpose for the school.
- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?
 - This has been well accomplished (see the list of beliefs at the beginning of this report). The school beliefs address key issues pertinent to effective decision-making and policy development. It appears that the implications of the school's belief statements and the level of the school's conviction to act upon the beliefs have been considered prior to finalizing the list of beliefs. The Visiting Team observes that the beliefs pertain to four specific areas.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

The align as recommended by NSSE. The Visiting Team observed that the analysis of student learning needs takes into account the profile data and related assessment and evaluation measures of student learning. The expectations for student learning reflect meaningful and appropriately challenging goals. They are free of jargon, and all stakeholders can understand the clear and concise language.

Curriculum Development:

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The curriculum is based on the Utah Core, and teachers work together to meet and modify the core as needed for the school's unique population. It appears that the Utah Life Skills are a part of the curriculum, although the Visiting Team did not discuss this with stakeholders. Standards for appropriate learning for varying abilities guide the development of curriculum.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

See above. All faculty members concur in focusing on the school-wide DRSLs as part of their teaching assignment. All staff members seemed to be conversant with the DRSLs, mission, and school beliefs.

Quality Instructional Design:

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

Teachers have learned that they must be creative and innovative with this student population, and to help with the rehabilitation of students as well as their academic needs. Teachers are very much aware that instructional time must be protected and appropriately allocated to support learning. The Visiting Team encourages the teaching staff to continue to improve this endeavor.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

Effort is made to meet individual needs. This is a primary objective of the educational program, and, indeed, a primary reason that students attend Vista.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

The students engage in several appropriate "additional opportunities" such as sports and community service, as well as activities, that directly to improve and enrich their learning through expanded use of time, facilities, and instructional resources.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?
 - The assessment of student learning includes an adequate sample of performance that is representative of what students can do, and provides sufficient evidence.
 - The reporting system for parents seems to be thorough and effective. It provides for open channels of communication among parents, teachers, and administrators
- b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?
 - Most assessments are linked to specific instructional uses that promote students' achievement and continuous improvement of their learning.
- c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

Assessments of student learning and grading practices appear to be fair. However, the faculty and administration should continue to investigate different forms of assessment in order to more effectively assess student comprehension. The faculty and administration should consider the use of additional means of both formative and summative assessment and the application of the outcomes to the improvement of instruction.

Leadership for School Improvement:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The principal is a competent educational leader who understands the importance of promoting and fostering quality instruction. He encourages decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and individualized. He, along with other administrators (see the list at the front of this report), provides skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. He monitors the work of the teachers and checks on the progress of the students. He also teaches.

The school leadership promotes quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

It appears that such decision making is employed.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

School leaders appear to be ever vigilant in monitoring both students and teachers. Certainly "continuous reflection" occurs.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

This is well done.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

It appears that this is accomplished.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

After speaking with various stakeholders, the Visiting Team concluded that this is encouraged.

Community Building:

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

As noted throughout this report, community building is part of the ethos of Vista. Positive and productive working relationships are established among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

As noted above, the school participates in community projects and service learning, which is an integral part of the program.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The school is committed to progressive change. Of course, a principle concern is to help these youngsters with their personnel problems in order that they may better achieve academically. Professional development is offered and sponsored with that objective in mind.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Standard I – Educational Program

Vista Private School meets all four sections of this standard. The educational program is aligned with the mission statement and beliefs. The Visiting Team observed that the vision for the school has been collaboratively developed. The instructional and organizational practices, as well as the policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society. The program of studies meets the requirements of the state.

Standard II – Student Personnel Services

All three sections of this standard are met. Personnel services are designed to give appropriate, systematic assistance to students as called for in the subsections of the requirements. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. The primary objective of the counseling program is to promote and enhance the academic and personal development of students and to prepare them for post-high school experiences.

Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

This standard is well met. The school plant provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere. It provides for the health and safety of students and all school faculty and personnel. The two campuses in pretty settings are very well maintained, clean, and conducive to learning.

Standard IV – Library Media Program

Vista partially meets this standard. The school library media program is a resource for literacy, information, and some curriculum support, and it contributes to the achievement of the DRSLs. However, the Visiting Team concluded that the library needs to be expanded with appropriate learning materials in order to better meet this standard

Standard V - Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

The five sections of this standard are met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding the performance of students has been incorporated into the comprehensive school improvement process, as has ongoing examination of instructional practices. The plan is updated and adjusted each year in alignment with perceived needs.

Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is not fully met. All professional personnel are not in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah.

Standard VIII - Administration

This standard is met. The administration of Vista Private School provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary and required administrative procedures.

Standard IX - Teacher Load

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS.

Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. Vista supports a range of activities that supplement and augment the basic instructional program by providing additional enriching experiences for students that are consistent with the school's mission and beliefs. Attention is paid to providing equal opportunities.

Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The plan seems to be adequate, well thought out, and directly aligned with the DRSLs. For each DRSL, specific actions to be carried out are listed along with a time line and the person(s) responsible for assuring that the actions are carried out. The Visiting Team encourages stakeholders to give specific dates for the accomplishment of some of the actions. Nearly all are now listed as "ongoing." An example follows:

ACTION	TIME LINE	STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBLE
Character Development		
All stakeholders will emphasize the	Ongoing	Principal, Teachers,
modeling of respectful behavior		Therapists

while interacting with each other, among staff, and peer groups.		
Continue the practice of Code of Conduct discussions and student acknowledgement that the code is understood as well as the consequences of violations.	Ongoing	Principal, Teachers, Therapists
Recognize that service is an integral part of character and opportunities to serve are provided as part of the educational curriculum.		

b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

All stakeholders understand the actions plan(s) and have made a commitment to it.

c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

See a) above.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the small departments for their thorough analyses.
- The Visiting Team commends the school leadership for providing good stewardship of the school
- The Visiting Team commends the stakeholders, administrators, and therapists for having created a nurturing atmosphere.
- The Visiting Team commends all faculty members for individualizing instruction to a great extent.
- The Visiting Team commends the owner for his commitment to maintaining JCAHO accreditation.

- The Visiting Team commends all personnel who have developed the excellent transition program.
- The Visiting Team commends all personnel for the development of productive service learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the owner for his active participation in the daily running of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends owners and administrators who are responsible for the variety of classes.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and leadership for creating the peer tutoring program.
- The Visiting Team commends all involved in the maintenance of excellent physical facilities.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and leadership for promoting the importance of SAT and ACT testing.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers be fully and properly licensed by the state of Utah as soon as possible.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school leadership make certain that the library is brought into complete compliance with NAAS Standard IV.
- The Visiting Team recommends that students be included in all future selfevaluation groups.
- The Visiting Team recommends that future action plans contain specific dates for achievement of some of the objectives.
- The Visiting Team recommends that a strong effort be made to place all profile information in a "profile" section of the self-study report, and that this data be summarized in summary statements.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the academic and therapeutic divisions continue to seek ways in which to work together as harmoniously and cooperatively as possible.

• The Visiting Team recommends that the leadership initiate longitudinal (followup) surveys to better track the post-Vista experiences of students. (The Visiting Team notes that the school intends to do this.)

Lastly, the school is reminded that accreditation provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the school. A primary purpose of accreditation is to protect the public trust. Accreditation promotes voluntary self-regulation. It is a means of showing confidence in a school's performance (i.e., that both quantitative and qualitative standards have been established). An ultimate objective of the self-study and accreditation process should be that schools institutionalize the process of reflective inquiry and thereby become internally responsible for the maintenance of standards—even the creation of standards.